

APOSTOLICAL RECORDS

OF

EARLY CHRISTIANITY:

FROM THE DATE OF THE CRUCIFIXION TO THE
MIDDLE OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

BY THE LATE

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Πολλῇ παρρησία χρώμεθα.—II Cor. iii, 12.

C.

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as being of the royal race of David. We are informed by Eusebius (iii, 20), on the authority of Hegesippus, as already quoted in this volume, that the emperor, fearing the coming of Christ, as had formerly been the case with Herod, caused two of these descendants of the ancient Israelitish sovereignty to be brought before him. Being interrogated on the subject, they confessed their lineage, and when asked what amount of property they possessed, they said that they possessed nine thousand denarii between the two, and that this was not in money, but was the estimated value of thirty-nine small measures of land, from which, after paying the taxes, they maintained themselves on what remained. Their hard and horny hands witnessed the truth of what they said: and when they were next questioned about the expected coming of Christ, and his kingdom, they declared that it was a heavenly and not an earthly kingdom which they looked for, and that it would begin at the completion of the age (*epi sunteleiā tou aiōnos*), when Christ would come in glory to judge the living and the dead, and would render to every man according to his deeds. This statement, coming from such a source, may be reasonably supposed to have excited nothing but contempt in the minds of those who were present. The emperor dismissed the simple peasants, satisfied that no danger could arise to his sovereignty from such humble revolutionists; and he immediately gave orders to stop the persecution which had been begun against the Christians throughout the empire. This account, taken from Hegesippus, whose words are quoted in page 83 of this volume, must be received for what it is worth; for some who do not profess to be critics, have classed it with the other legends which were so plentiful within an hundred years of the crucifixion.

It is not to be denied that other names than those which have here been given are mentioned in Eusebius as well as in other writers, and even in the New Testament itself; but their connection with the Holy Family is so obscure and inconsistent with itself, that it is dangerous to go beyond the statement of three Gospels that there were four other sons of Joseph and Mary besides daughters, and that they were brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.

To this account of the family of Jesus it may be interesting to the English reader to know some other particulars concerning the name itself, which appears in the Scriptural books written in the Greek language without any notice of

berdiers. Then others advanced, some as about to do him obeisance, others to plead before him, and others again to treat with him about public business.

It is not to be wondered that in almost the earliest days of Christianity, when the events which are recorded in the gospels had become matters of history, and no longer of living witness and experience, the family of Jesus should be enquired into by a large number of zealous men belonging to the Christian community. Not only, however, are zealous Christians likely to have turned their attention to such an enquiry, but we cannot doubt that evil-minded men, bent upon either gain or notoriety, and other objects, flooded the world with a mass of spurious writings, under the names of the Apostles and even of Christ himself, of Joseph, and of the Virgin Mary; whereas even in the canonical scriptures, all these are seldom mentioned, in deference to the great teacher beside whom their insignificance does not merit a line of explanation. Of these spurious works it would be needless to speak were it not that a great number of them have been published, and whilst they furnish to some a groundwork from which to assail the truth of the genuine Scriptures, they do on the other hand furnish to others a test by which to ascertain the true method by which those Scriptures are to be interpreted. To enlarge on this subject would demand more time than can here be allowed to it; our object is to refer briefly by name to the writings of this kind which are open to those who desire to read them.*

1. The reputed father of Jesus was Joseph the carpenter. There is a tract which has been often published, entitled *Historia Josephi fabri lignarii*, "History of Joseph the Carpenter," in which Jesus is the narrator; he is represented telling his disciples, as they were sitting on the Mount of Olives, the history of his own parentage. It will be sufficient to give one section of this, translated from the Latin, which itself is a translation from the Arabic, and it is not unimportant here to notice.

There was a man named Joseph, by birth a Bethlehemite, of the

* The most critical and authoritative edition of these writings is that of Tischendorf, in three volumes: (1) *Evangelia Apocrypha*, (2) *Acta Apocrypha*, (3) *Apocalypses Apocryphæ*, 8vo, 1853-1862. His edition of *Epistolæ Apocryphæ*, which would complete the series, has not yet appeared.

A convenient edition of most of these, including others not contained in Tischendorf's, is *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti*, &c., ed. J. A. Giles 8vo, D. Nutt, Londini, 1852. In one or the other of these two are contained all the extracts quoted in the present work.

city of Judah and the state of David the king. He being well instructed in science and learning, became a priest in the temple of the Lord. Moreover he was crafty in the carpenter's art, and after the custom of all men, married a wife. He also begat for himself sons and daughters, to wit four sons and two daughters. Now these are the names of those : Judas, Justus, James, and Simon; the names of the two daughters were Assia and Lydia. At length the wife of the righteous Joseph died, intent on the glory of God in all her works. But that righteous man, Joseph my father according to the flesh, and husband of Mary my mother, went away with his sons to his business, practising the art of a carpenter.

The whole narrative which follows is intended to soften down the Scriptural account of the birth of Jesus by the introduction of details which have in the canonical history been wisely omitted; and it has evidently been the design of the writer to remove the children of Joseph from all brotherhood with Jesus, by representing them as born from a different mother who died before the marriage of Joseph with the Virgin Mary. In the fourth century, when this tract is supposed to have been written, it had perhaps become necessary to fill a void in orthodox sentiment which had escaped notice 200 years from the time when the four gospels were set forth in writing.

A second class of Apocryphal writings touches on the history of the Virgin Mary. There are two or three gospels of the Nativity of the Virgin combined with a gospel of the Infancy of Jesus: there are letters said to have passed between her and Ignatius, besides other tracts containing the most absurd and audacious fictions about her, whose very name has been kept by one of the four evangelists from the knowledge of his readers, whilst the other three have observed a respectful silence on all such points as were not immediately connected with the life and teaching of her son.

A single example of the spirit in which these fictions have been written, may be given from the Gospel of the Nativity.

When the course of three years and the time of weaning was completed, they [*her parents Joachim and Anna*] brought the Virgin with offerings to the Temple of the Lord. Now there were round the Temple fifteen steps of ascent according to the fifteen gradual psalms: for because the Temple was built on a hill, the altar of burnt offering which was outside could not be approached save by steps. On one of these then her parents